

<b>Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> Nov 2020</b> <b>Cathedral, Grahamstown</b> <b>7.30 &amp; 9.30 a.m.</b> <b>Live-streamed, 9.30 a.m.</b>		<b>24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost</b> <b>MISSION SUNDAY</b>
Zeph 1:7, 12-18	Ps 90:1-8, 12	1 Thess 5:1-11
		Matthew 25:14-30
<b>TO THE GLORY OF GOD</b>		

How much are we driven by anger or fear? Both these emotions are immensely powerful forces – we all know, I am sure, what it feels like to be angry, furiously angry; and probably there have been times when we have been deeply afraid, have felt fear, or even terror. I remember an occasion in the bush in northern Nambia when I found myself literally shaking with fear. Or lying in bed at night in Bonteheuwel, on the Cape Flats, listening to gun shots echoing around the neighbourhood, knowing that there was a gang fight on the go, and waiting in fear for the phone call asking me to go to the household of the person who had been shot. We know the fear of a nightmare, or the fear of an unusual sound at night, or the fear of attack or danger, or perhaps times when we have had to run for our lives. This time of year, with exams on the go, is a fearful time for many young people! Few of us go into an exam without a twinge of anxiety or fear. If you do, you are one in a million!

## OUR SCRIPTURES

We turn to the scriptures to find hope and good news. And usually that is what we encounter – the love and grace and <sub>1</sub>

mercy of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ - and indeed that is the underlying theme of Old and New Testament. But our scripture readings for today are not at first sight words of mercy and grace and love. Instead, they are solemn words of warning and fear. They speak of the day of the Lord, the day when the Lord will come. But this day will not be one of delight and joy. Instead, it will be a day of solemn judgement on the whole earth, and on God's rebellious people.

“The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast... that day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry...” (Zeph 1:14-16).

Zephaniah and other prophets warned that the day of the Lord would be a day of judgement, when the enemies of Israel and Judah would overwhelm them and bring destruction – this destruction being God's judgement on the sin and disobedience of God's people.

St Paul writes to the Thessalonian church to warn them that the day of the Lord “will come like a thief in the night” (1 Thess 5:2) – unexpectedly, without warning.

Our gospel reading, the parable of the talents, is also a solemn warning to use to the utmost what we have been given, not to bury it in the ground (Matt 25:14-30). The time will come, according to the parable, when we shall be

called to give an account of how we have used our talents.

## **THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT**

The early church, the first Christians, believed that Christ would return during their life time. They lived in expectation of the second coming, the return of Christ as Lord and King and Judge. This is reflected in the Nicene Creed: our statement of belief that “Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end”<sup>1</sup>.

Even now, 2000 years after the time of Christ, we live expecting that the world as we know it will come to an end; that Christ will return; that the kingdom of God will appear in all its fulness; that God’s purpose for the world will be completed; that our lives now as we live them in Christ offer a foretaste, a glimpse, of God’s purpose. There is an occasional ray of light. Heaven begins now.

The belief or hope that there will be a judgment, either now or in the future, is very deeply rooted in each one of us. People speak half-jokingly and half seriously of Karma – the theory that what happens to a person, happens because they caused it with their actions – that what you do, good or bad, will come back to you. Indeed, we are part of a universe which is ultimately held in God’s hands – and so it is a universe when justice and righteousness will prevail; evil and cruelty will be defeated, there will be a judgment,

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<sup>1</sup> *An Anglican Prayer Book* pg 108

what people do, whether good or evil, will have consequences.

Eugene Peterson:

“We live in a vast world of interconnectedness, and the connections have consequences, either in things or in people – and all the consequences come together in God. The biblical phrase for the coming together of the consequences is Judgment Day.

“We can’t be reminded too often or too forcefully of this reckoning”<sup>2</sup>.

## USING OUR TALENTS

Matt 24 and 25 is the fifth and final section of teaching, of the sayings of Jesus, in this gospel. The parables tell of the final coming and the judgement: the steward who is called to give account; the five foolish and the five wise bridesmaids of last Sunday’s gospel; the parable of the talents today; the parable of the sheep and the goats next Sunday. The world will end, Jesus will return in glory, and everyone will find themselves either the blessed, who receive eternal life; or the cursed, who receive eternal punishment.

The first two servants in the parable are a picture of those who have received and embraced the good news (the

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<sup>2</sup> Peterson, E., 2003. *The Message/Remix*, p 1718

talents), the grace of God, and whose lives bring forth fruit and life. The third slave is the tragic figure who receives the good news but does nothing with it. Instead, it stays hidden in the soil. The grace and love of God that is poured out into the world is embraced by some but rejected by others. What a tragedy. What have we done with the grace of God? What have we done with this great gift we have received?

The talents are also the gifts and abilities and opportunities that each of us have. What are we doing with them? What are we doing with our lives? How are we using our talents, given to us by God?

Covid has hit us hard. We are like a boxer in a boxing ring, having received an almost knock-out blow, staggering around the ring trying to keep standing. These are tough times. As we seek to build the life of the Cathedral following the covid lockdown, it is wonderful to see what people are doing, the financial giving that keeps us afloat, the St George's Fair with a Difference, our hardworking churchwardens and PCC, our volunteers seen and unseen, the efforts to keep the Cathedral and our community going. We are experiencing a roller coaster iro our finances and I appeal to us all to be faithful with our pledging. Our Makana Choir School AGM is later this morning and I thank all involved in our music ministry – organists, choirs, marimbas, Kepa our acting DOM. Here in Makhanda we are seeing a spike in covid infections. Let's keep going with covid protocols – wear a mask, social distancing,

avoid large gatherings. Let's be signs of God's kingdom.

Looking more broadly, in a tribute to the late Auditor General of SA, Kimi Makwetu, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba paid tribute to his work, and noted that his “service to South Africa is unparalleled in its commitment to the values of good governance and his determination to make the country accountable for public spending. It is a great pity that despite his and his staff's work, the number of qualified audits remains so high, and that so much money is wasted on expenditure which does not serve the common good. I call on all South Africans, and especially those running municipalities, to commit to serving all of our citizens with integrity”<sup>3</sup>.

Using our talents, not out of fear, but knowing that what we do, does make a difference. Praying for the Zondo commission in its efforts to bring the corrupt to account. Holding our justice system in our prayers. I welcome the arrest of Ace Magashule. Let's see more such arrests. Here in Makhanda we continue to struggle with our municipality and long for a change for the better here. Let's pray for the USA during this time of leadership transition. Let's continue to pray for SA that we may have an end to greed and corruption, an end to anger and hatred. Let's pray for the community of Brackenfell High School.

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<sup>3</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> November 2020

## CONCLUSION

Using our talents to the glory of God. Let's do that, so that when the great day comes, we can hear the words of the Father, "Come and share my joy."

Creator God, send your holy Spirit to renew this living world, that the whole creation, in its groaning and striving, may know your loving purpose and come to reflect your glory; in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>4</sup>

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Dean of Grahamstown  
15<sup>th</sup> November 2020

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<sup>4</sup> Psalm Prayer for Ps 104, CoE website